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# CLASS SPIRIT IN AMERICA

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## CLASS SPIRIT IN AMERICA.

It is the studied effort of the Socialist agitator to arouse a "class-conscious" spirit on the part of workingmen. He would have them believe that there is absolutely nothing in common between the capitalist and the laborer. He thinks that only as workingmen are governed by this spirit in their social and political life will success attend the Socialist propaganda, forgetting, or ignoring, the fact that true Socialism rests upon a spirit of brotherhood and co-operation.

He probably knows that Socialism can never succeed unless there is a spirit of service among all men, especially the men of superior talent, and that this spirit can be developed only as love prevails. However, he starts out with the fallacy that sowing the seed of hatred will bring in a harvest of love.

His stock argument is that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. He assumes that the condition of the "wage-slave" is becoming worse by reason of the present social system. It would be folly to insist that the social system of the day is ideal. But any man who reads history knows that the condition of the workingman to-day is infinitely better than it was a century ago.

There has been steady progress like the irresistible sweep of a mighty river. Eddies have been formed which seem to mark the

backward course of the stream. The agitator has seen the eddy and points to it as an indication that there has been only a backward movement, indifferent to the fact that the flood just beyond reveals true progress.

It is long since he has seen anything with a clear vision. He has been looking at life through pieces of colored glass—the colored glass of pessimism, of prejudice, of hatred, of bigotry. He cannot understand how other people can see a beautiful, God-given green, while he sees only a dismal brown. Talk to him about the joys of life, and he will tell you that he sees only sorrow.

He has forgotten that only a few centuries ago half the world lived in slavery, and human life was counted so cheap that men and women were killed for sport. Speak to him of the progress made by working people, and he will fling into your face the bitter argument of the anarchist, unmindful of the day when labor was considered degrading and dishonorable—when the philosophers declared that a purchased laborer is better than a hired one; when the workingman lived in a small, dingy, foul-smelling room; when he slept in cellars and over open drains; when men worked sixteen hours a day the year round, without being paid for the “overtime.”

He has forgotten the time when manufacturers were actually paid to rid a parish of pauper children, who then became white

slaves; when conditions were so degrading that in many cases full-grown men remained at home caring for the babies or mending stockings, while the women were engaged at the wearing work of the mill; when it was a crime to increase the workingman's wages above a certain amount; when the workingman could be put into jail for owing a storekeeper ten cents; when the mechanic received fifty cents for a day's work, at a time when that fifty cents would purchase no more than it will to-day.

The condition of the American workingman to-day is superior to that of the royalty of three centuries ago. He has a better home, more conveniences, more books, more of the things that make life worth the living.

In proportion, he has made infinitely more progress than the privileged classes of a century ago. The increase in wages, the shortening of his hours of work, the multiplication of his comforts, his new educational advantages, his superior position as a citizen and as a man—all these have made the average workingman a progressive, right-thinking human being.

As already noted, conditions are not ideal. There is much that needs to be adjusted. Because of this, among the so-called "masses," there is a feeling of unrest which many fear. It is supposed this feeling indicates that there may be an uprising destructive of law and



order as well as of the great prosperity which has heretofore attended us. No one need fear a sane agitation carried on by honest, intelligent men. It is a sign of life and growth, and an indication of better things to come. The good sense of the American people will see that it comes out all right. But Rome was not built in a day. It should be remembered that there is no short cut to the millennium, especially by way of a manufactured social system. This change must come by evolution and not by revolution.

The bitterness of the workingman will not be healed by an arbitrary division of men into classes. Any class movement in this country, be it a workingman's movement or an employers' movement, is sure to fail.

The rich are frequently accused of fostering a class spirit. However that may be, this unfortunate spirit is not confined to the prosperous. The same spirit exists among workingmen. The journeyman frequently treats his helper with the greatest contempt. The mechanics in some trades consider themselves superior to those engaged in some others. Because some workingmen are privileged to wear white linen shirts while at their work, they despise the laborer whose toil compels him to wear one made of wool or cotton. This spirit of caste has also gone over to their wives. In a little Minnesota railroad town the wives of the engineers, the firemen and the brakemen

are formed into exclusive women's clubs. It was absolutely impossible for the fireman's wife to join the club composed of the engineers' wives, and as for the brakeman's wife—she simply "wasn't in it." There must first of all be a greater spirit of brotherhood among workingmen themselves before they accuse others of fostering a class spirit.

If ever the labor question is to be settled, men must have the spirit of brotherhood taught by Jesus Christ himself. There are broad-minded workingmen who have a large vision. Men who deprecate the bitterness and the stinging personalities which have been injected into a campaign which should be fought out on its merits and on principle. But the average agitator, with his pessimism, his cruel satire, his appeal to class prejudice, can only retard the growth of the spirit of brotherhood which must prevail before the golden age can be ushered in.

#### **Other Leaflets by Charles Stelzle**

"Has the Minister a 'Closed Shop'?"

"Is the Church Opposed to Workingmen?"

"Jesus Christ and Rich Men."

"Labor Leaders in the Church."

"Not 'Missions,' but Churches, for Workingmen."

"One Pastor, One Church, One Year and One Hundred Dollars."

"Special Work Among Workingmen by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions."

"The Organization of an Anti-Poverty Society."

"The Plan of Campaign in the Interest of Workingmen."

"The Relation of the Church to the Labor Movement."

